



State of Wisconsin
Department of Public Instruction
Elizabeth Burmaster, State Superintendent

*****NEWS RELEASE*****

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Wisconsin public libraries are a valuable resource

State ranks first in interlibrary loans per capita

MADISON—"Wisconsin residents love their libraries," said State Superintendent Elizabeth Burmaster in announcing statewide library usage data.

In 2005, the state's 3.2 million registered library users made more than 33 million library visits to check out books, videos, music, and other materials; attend special programming; or use the library's reference materials and resources, including the Internet. Public library circulation surpassed 57.9 million items, an increase of nearly 2 percent over 2004 circulation. Interlibrary loans, the key indicator of resource sharing among libraries, grew to 5.5 million items, a 13 percent increase over 2004. Data from the National Center for Education Statistics (2004) places Wisconsin first in interlibrary loans per capita, eighth in circulation per capita, and 11th in public library visits per capita.

"Our public libraries are a valuable part of each community," Burmaster said. "Library staff work throughout our libraries and library systems to share resources and provide the wide range of services that citizens need. However, our libraries cannot continue to provide more and more services with little to no growth in library staffing levels."

Wisconsin's 388 independent public libraries and 17 federated public library systems are staffed by 6,284 paid library personnel and thousands of library volunteers. Despite growth in library use, 2005 library staffing remained at 2004 levels. The state superintendent's 2007-09 biennial budget request seeks increased funding to support various library services and service contracts.

"Wisconsin's public library and library system staff members are to be commended for providing all Wisconsin residents with high levels of library service," Burmaster said. She noted that library services go beyond books and printed materials. They include such services as BadgerLink, which provides access to more than 700 newspapers and 11,000 magazines; educational and informational programs for

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children and adults; and other resources that ensure Wisconsin residents have equal access to informational materials required to do coursework, meet curriculum needs, or pursue personal and business interests regardless of where they live or their special needs or circumstances.

A recent report on “Public Libraries and the Internet 2006” showed that 10 years ago, just 25 percent of public libraries provide Internet access. Today, 99 percent of all U.S. public libraries do so. In Wisconsin, all public libraries have Internet connections, and almost all of them provide high speed Internet access. Much of that growth was the result of a Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation grant that distributed 743 personal computers and servers to 235 Wisconsin public libraries and branches in 2003. The grant will continue to provide technology training through the first half of 2007.

Librarians interviewed for the report, “Public Libraries and the Internet 2006,” placed high importance on computers in libraries. They overwhelmingly said that the most important impact of having library computers wired to the Internet was providing this service to citizens who would otherwise not have Internet access.

“Digital connections, which citizens access through our public libraries, have seen increasing demand over the years,” Burmaster said. “Wisconsin’s statewide informational databases, such as those provided through BadgerLink, make our libraries accessible to all state residents via their home, school, and work computers. It is vital that those without computers have access to these resources through their local library. From books to web access to online resources, the library’s role in lifelong learning is an essential part helping all citizens participate in our democratic society.”

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